

SONGS FROM CAPE BRETON ISLAND

RECORDED BY SIDNEY ROBERTSON COWELL

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SONGS FROM CAPE BRETON ISLAND

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SONGS FROM CAPE BRETON ISLAND

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

by

Sidney Robertson Cowell

and

John P. Hughes

Cape Breton (K'Briton) is the eastern quarter of Nova Scotia - an island 110 miles long and nearly as wide, lying across the narrow Gut of Canso from the mainland. It is a thousand miles nearer Great Britain than New York is, and it juts out into the Atlantic sea lanes like the "long wharf of Canada" that it has been called. On the map it suggests a lobster reaching toward Newfoundland between the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the windy Atlantic, with its outlines formed by the Bras d'Or (Bre-dor') Lakes and other such long inland arms of the sea.

One has an impression of a wilderness on which man has not bothered to make any conspicuous impression, except of course in the few large towns. Tourists are somehow not very noticeable in the landscape, and even in the crowds drawn by the Mod at St. Ann's College in August, most of the strangers seemed to feel themselves guests. A surprising number of them came from big cities in the United States to show their families the country where their great-grandparents had been pioneers.

The roads are for the most part wide and good; near the towns some of them are paved or oiled. Many roads are so recent that travel by water is still commonplace, and so small boats add the soft colors of their once-brilliant paint to the landscape. One comes on little boat landings, with the nets or lobster pots of some independent fisherman, in remote coves as well as near the occasional small towns. A trip of any length on the Island requires one ferry crossing at least, sometimes more. Ferries are also ice-breakers, with strongly built prows to keep the crossings open in winter.

Cape Breton is a name that was familiar to seafarers in the middle of the 15th century, for Basque explorers are supposed to have discovered it then and to have named it for its resemblance to familiar parts of the shores of Brittany.

The high bluff at Cape North was John Cabot's landfall in 1498 -- the first sight of North

America formally recorded by a European, a year before Columbus reached the mainland.

During the 18th century, Cape Breton's fine harbors so close to the Atlantic ship lanes made her a bone of contention between France and England; at one moment, in 1745, it was a force of militant New Englanders who retrieved Cape Breton from France for England. England's attention having turned elsewhere a few years later, the old fort at Louisburg was made their special refuge by bands of pirates. When finally the fort was razed to the ground and the harbor deliberately ruined, insurance rates for ships passing between New England and Great Britain dropped from 30% to 12% -- an encouragement to ship building in the New World that shaped the whole later history of New England.

The settlement of Cape Breton by pioneering families was later than elsewhere in Canada because the government reserved the Island as a military base. British sympathizers took refuge in Canada after the American Revolution, but they did not settle here. After 1784, however, colonization began. The first-comers were descendants of the Highland clans defeated at Culloden, relatives of General Wolfe's Highland soldiers who had carried home good reports of the Island.

Crop failures in Scotland, as also in Ireland, scattered the enterprising population of the Gaelic-speaking world several times during the 19th century, and whole communities of hardy souls, led often by their ministers, moved out of remote parts of the Highlands -- northern Scotland and the Hebrides -- in hope of better things in Canada. Highland Scots were attracted to Cape Breton because it was so like the rugged rock-and-water country they had left behind. This meant that the problems of earning a living were to be much the same, with the added burden of building afresh from the beginning. So they found life harder in Canada, not easier. Old accounts speak of the difficulty of felling trees and building homes when no one owned a proper axe, and of cultivating the ground without a plow.

Real prosperity seems always to have eluded the Cape Breton Islander. The lumber industry once brought money in, for Cape Breton spars for masts and planks for decks were famous in their day. Now that all the evergreens of commercial size are gone, short logs cut from hardwood forests are used for pulpwood. Around 1900 Baddeck was a boisterous mecca for loggers just out of the woods, but today the town is peaceful, its great pride the relics of Alexander Graham Bells's experiments, his old home, and his grave. The development of the coal mines around Sydney created another period of relative prosperity, and dairy farming has had its good years too.

The main source of income today is commercial fishing. This is a hard life, fit only for young men able to leave home. In the years when the cod fishing on the Banks of Newfoundland is poor, many men work for the big steamship companies. Cruise ships, for instance on the Bermuda and South American runs, can produce a surprising number of K'Briton Islanders from between decks -- hard living, hard driving, hard drinking fellows whose capacity for work and for liquor is the marvel of their officers. With the current modification of northern climates, tuna (called horse mackerel in Nova Scotia) and even swordfish begin to be profitable.

THE GAELIC LANGUAGE

The Gaelic language crossed the Irish Sea to Scotland about the sixth century with the first "Scots", who were missionaries and traders from Ireland. (In the Middle Ages, the word Scotus meant "a man from Ireland".) These Celtic travellers landed first in the Hebrides with their language, and it spread thence to the western Highlands. Around the 13th century regional differences in speech began to be noticeable, but until the 17th century Gaelic-speaking Scots and Gaelic-speaking Irishmen considered themselves one Celtic community. Since then political circumstances have divided the two peoples, but the forms of Gaelic spoken today in Ireland, in Scotland and on the Isle of Man are properly to be considered one language which has developed regional variations and somewhat different orthography. Even today the Ulster speech resembles the Hebrides Gaelic fairly closely, although between certain other districts the difference is great.

A line drawn from Inverness to Glasgow on the map of Scotland may be called the "Highland line" -- the approximate limit of penetration of Gaelic (usually pronounced Gah'lick by Scotsmen) into Scotland. The Lowland Scots are the descendants of a Germanic people.

The Gaelic of the North Shore community on Cape Breton Island is much like the language of

the Hebrides as spoken on the island of Harris; but it has naturally developed certain dialectical peculiarities of its own. In several places the words are modified in singing to the point where alternative and sometimes even contradictory reconstructions are possible.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC ON CAPE BRETON

The Mod is the week-long climax of summer session instruction in Scottish music and dancing, held out of doors at St. Ann's College, near Baddeck. Like the Scottish Games at Antigonish it draws Gaelic-speaking folk and their descendants from all over Nova Scotia for the event. More than 150 adults and children were scattered over the shores of St. Ann's Bay during the 1953 competitions. Some of the judges, along with the guest of honor, The MacKinnon in person, came directly from Scotland. Medals were awarded by the Scottish Folk Dance Society's representative, whose instruction during the summer session and whose really fine exhibition dancing served to keep up standards and inspire the young people for another year. Youngsters take their bagpipe playing seriously, and there are many Girls' Pipe Bands and Boys' Pipe Bands. The St. Ann's Gaelic College Girls' Pipe Band is an especially well-known one. Several grey-haired pipers, looking very handsome in clan dress, were present at the Mod to compete for the Nova Scotia pipers' title. These men were regarded with awe and admiration by everyone, and they spent every free minute with younger players, cheerfully listening, advising and demonstrating in the traditional way.

The Gaelic singing is in a quite different situation from the piping. The youngest of the singers were men in their fifties, and most were twenty years older than that. Some singers still have large repertoires and are in demand at community gatherings where "the old days" are celebrated. But the young people cannot be said to be learning the old songs at all. They envisage a future in which Gaelic music, like the language, can be of no practical use to them; and of course there is the familiar feeling that "modern" things are more "in style" (cowboy and hill billy singing, and French-Canadian songs accompanied by a symphony orchestra, for instance).

No matter how anxious the College may be to encourage real continuity in the singing tradition, the problem of providing a proper incentive can no longer be solved. Pipers still have something of a role in the outside world; traditional singers really do not. The radio has made it unnecessary for even the most isolated community to maintain its traditional music for its own entertainment. Work songs survive only as a kind of commemorative game.

The Millers (or the North Shore Singers, as they alternatively call themselves) are famous all over Nova Scotia for having preserved work songs from the Hebrides. The group seems to depend on a nucleus of four enthusiasts, with a larger membership of perhaps a dozen who are called on as they can find time to go about singing. The North Shore Singers who are heard in these recordings include: Malcolm J. MacAulay, Dan J. Morrison, Tom Angus MacDonald, Malcolm Angus MacLeod, John A. MacDonald, Garret MacDonald, Dan A. MacDonald, Malcolm Angus MacDonald, Mr. and Mrs. John M. MacInnes, Mistress James Morrison, and Pipe Majors Archie MacInnes and Fraser Holmes.

With one exception (Malcolm J. MacAulay, who comes from the Englishtown district), all of the singers were born within 30 miles of one another on the North Shore-- at Skir Dhu, Briton Cove, Wreck Cove, North Cove, or North River. The two women are in their forties, and Garret MacDonald is seventy; Mr. MacAulay and Dan Morrison are nearly eighty, and all the other singers are men in their fifties. Only two of the five MacDonalds are related: John A. MacDonald and Tom A. MacDonald are second cousins.

The grandparents of these singers spoke only Gaelic, except for one or two who "had a little English." The singers' parents learned English if they needed it, a few of them in school; but there was little occasion for them to read or to write either language. The singers themselves all spoke Gaelic first as children at home, and they began to speak English at about the time that they went to school. The generation following these singers, today's young people and children, are learning almost no Gaelic, so that the language has become little more than a symbol of the profound tie between the Scotch in Canada and "at home." Adults find it useful for talking over the heads of children and strangers, and there are still a few old people who have never learned English. But these singers are the last generation of Scots in Canada to hear Gaelic and speak it from birth.

Malcolm Angus MacLeod commented on song learning and milling in the following words:

"We learned our songs from one another, and from parents and older people. As for myself, I learned a lot of them from my parents, as they both knew a lot of songs. I remember when some boys would come to the house (older than myself) and the night would be spent in singing

I knew one young man, who has passed on since, who would make songs. If anything exciting would happen he would be told of it and he would compose a few verses and sing them before leaving the house.

"At milling frolics people would meet that did not have an opportunity of meeting for weekly visits, and they would drive with horse and sleigh for nearly twenty miles. I mention horse and sleigh because milling frolics were held in fall and winter, when the nights and evenings were long. There we would learn songs from one another.

"It must be at least fifteen years or perhaps more since milling was done as a regular thing on Cape Breton Island. But even twenty years ago they (milling frolics) were few. But 35 years ago, there would be as many as three in one week. It seemed that weaving started around the same time of year with everyone. The wool would have to be carded by hand, then spun. The women would have to attend to knitting mitts and socks and that was no small job, as there were large families. After that was attended to the weaving would start. There was material for blankets which did not require much milling. But there was also homespun, used for pants and jackets, which required much milling. It would be 36 inches wide (the width of the loom) when it was put on the milling boards and it would have to be down to 28 (or sometimes 32) inches before it was pronounced finished (a matter of one to two hours). So you see it would have to shrink a lot, and it was no fooling, it would have to be done, or the lady of the house would be quite mad over it.

"The reason it stopped was that the younger women in many cases did not learn to weave and as the older ones were passing out only a few could weave and they were kept very busy and charged from 8 cents to 20 cents a yard for weaving, which was poor pay yet considered high.

"Another reason, people got modern, and they wouldn't be seen going to school or church with homespun when someone who was a bit better off would be wearing material purchased from a store or mail order house.

"Sixty or seventy years ago and farther back, as in the Hebrides, it was only the women did the work of milling, and this was done mostly in daytime.

"In many cases the work ran on into the early hours of the night. Later on, the girls used to drag the milling on into the night on purpose so

as the boys would arrive to see them home....
And at last girls and boys would arrive together
after supper to start milling."

NOTES ON THE RECORDINGS

SIDE I, BAND 1: HÉ MO LEANNAN (HEY, MY DARLING). One of the most popular songs for milling, recorded at Briton Cove.

A girl sings exuberantly of her sweetheart, who is not, however, as faithful as he should be. A different version with a related refrain appears in Vol. 1 of the Kennedy-Fraser Songs of the Hebrides, and still another version of the text is printed in The Macdonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry (Inverness, 1911).

Refrain:

Hè mo leannan, hó mo leannan,
's è mo leannan am fear ùr,
Hè mo leannan, hó mo leannan.

Hey, my darling, ho, my darling,
My darling is the young man,
Hey, my darling, ho, my darling.

Eighteen stanzas sung by a single leader (Dan J. Morrison) ring a few changes on 4 tones; the 2nd degree of the scale appears only in the chorus, where the tune is solidly Pentatonic Mode 3, lacking the 4th and the 7th degrees (Gilchrist Classification). The meter is 2/4; the structure has the regular 6 plus 4 measures of milling songs. Sometimes the meter is clearly 1/4 (without any sense of a rebound to form the weak beat) and I believe that if the beater for milling were in use, this would be true consistently.

SIDE I, BAND 2: MO H-INGHEANN DHONN (MY BROWN-HAIRED MAIDEN). Recorded at Briton Cove. This fond lover would not exchange his sweetheart, whose clothes so become her, for a thousand guineas or any other woman he has ever seen. "For no conceivable treasure, at any season or in any weather, will he change his mind that's set on her forever. Even if he should go afar, clear to Scatterree (Dr. Hughes suggests perhaps Scadalay, on Harris near Loch Tarbert), he will surely not forget her."

A somewhat different version has been published in Teagadòir (Toronto, 1953), vol. 1, no. 2.

Refrain:

I-ua-thò, a-rì a-rò
cha threiginn fhìn mo h-ingheann dhonn,
I-ua-thò, a-rì a-ro.

I-ua-hò, a-rì a-rò,
I myself would not exchange my brown-haired
maid,
I-ua-hò, a-rì a-rò.

This is a boat song, often sung while rowing.
The leader is Malcolm J. MacAulay.

The chorus is 12 measures of 3/8, the stanza 9 measures, and there is one measure's overlapping between chorus and leader at the end of each stanza, bring the total length to 20 measures in all. The chorus and most of the stanzas use the first 5 tones above the tonic, plus its octave, with a half-tone (roughly: some singers are singing a neutral third, some a minor third) between scale degrees 2 and 3. The leader sounds the major 6th degree (B-natural) in the first stanza (but never again anywhere in the song) and he brings the raised 7th degree in during the 4th stanza. These 2 notes complete the suggestion of a Dorian past (since the leader is one of the oldest singers) for this tune, which may be in its present form a simplification of an older, more complex melody.

SIDE I, BAND 3: LA LA LÒ, LA LUADHADH (WITH WATER, WITH MILLING) Recorded during a milling frolic at Skir Dhu. This is a song both for and about milling. The English terms waulking and fulling, both in use in Scotland, seemed to be unknown to the North Shore singers.

Refrain:

Cadadh la la lò, la luadhadh
Rèitich; ùp a' ròdha; tiughaich
Cadadh la la lò, la luadhadh

Tartan cloth with water, with milling (fulling)
Prepare; pull the roll about; thicken
Cloth with water, with milling.

These refrains are all couplets whose first lines are repeated to make the third lines; the soloist's stanzas are always shorter. In this case, we do not have the usual 6:4 ratio between chorus and stanza, for here the chorus is 5 measures of 2/4 and the stanza is 3 measures long.

The tonal center of this hexatonic tune has been taken, with some misgivings, as B^b. So the tune lacks the 4th degree of the scale and has its 7th degree sounded only once, in passing, and it can be thought of as moving from Pentatonic Mode 3 toward the Lydian or the Ionian modes.

The singing here is of especial musical interest for the imaginative way in which successive leaders ring the melodic and rhythmic changes on the 4 scale tones to which the brief 3-measure stanza phrase confines itself. In the course of

forms. There are no cadences, no pauses for breath; the last beat of the soloist's section is picked up and turned into the first beat of their section by the chorus, so that the forward drive of the music never lags.

SIDE I, BAND 4: AN SEÒLADAIR CURANTA (THE STEADFAST MARINER). Recorded at a milling frolic at Skir Dhu. This is an account of a rough voyage from Boston to the Hebrides. The boat was overtaken by a severe storm when three days out at sea, and was driven off its course. One sailor was lost, and the narrator spent three days lashed to the wheel. "In the frost the rope was three times its size in the hands. The tops'l and the roy'l broke away (it's no fun to be telling it.)" Some of the verses were printed in Teangadoir (Toronto, 1953), vol. I, no. 2.

Refrain:

Ged a sheòl mi air m'aineol
Cha laigh smalan air m'inntin,
Ged a sheòl mi air m'aineol.

Though I sailed in strange waters,
My spirit is undaunted,
Though I sailed in strange waters.

The pronunciation of ged as gat is a feature of Skye speech.

The music consists of 12 measures of 3/8 for the chorus and 8 measures for the stanza, with irregular phrase lengths within the sections, so that it cannot be reduced to regular measures of 6/8; nevertheless the normal 6:4 ratio of milling songs is maintained.

Melodically it is interesting because, although a 4-tone scale is strongly outlined by the accented tones in the chorus, and a 5-tone scale in the stanza, the voices slide through the missing scale degrees and the chorus even supplies faintly both E-sharp and E-natural. This is so completely continuous and circular a tune that I do not attempt to fit it into Miss Gilchrist's classification. It is certainly on its way to a 7-tone scale, but at present it offers, out of its 5 strong tones, 4 perfectly good possibilities for its tonic.

SIDE I, BAND 5: 'N UAIR NIGHIDH TÙ (WHEN YOU WASH). Recorded at a milling frolic at Skir Dhu. This is a work song for washday, used also for the rather similar pounding and scrubbing movements of milling. The words of the verses cannot well be made out because of the noise of the crowd at the milling frolic, but similar songs have a verse on each stage of the operation, and at the end a blessing on the work and those engaged in it.

'n uair nighidh tù, nigh, tonn, dèabh;
Bheir a' nighitean bòidh a' chlò,
An uair nighidh tù, nigh, teann.

When you wash, wash, splash, dry,
The soap will make the clothes neat,
When you wash, wash, fall to.

This song has the 6:4 relationship between chorus and stanza sections usual in milling songs, but the actual meter is 1/4; the structure is therefore 12 measures plus 8 measures, with interlocking beats between leader and chorus at beginning and end of each section.

Like La la lò, la luadhadh, this is an early type of tune, confined to very few (4) tones in the stanza whose musical interest derives from the leader's skill in making tiny variations in the tonal and rhythmic pattern. The chorus has the full 5 tones of Pentatonic Mode 3 (no 4th nor 7th degrees).

SIDE II, BAND 1: A' CHALLUINN (NEW YEAR'S DAY). Recorded at St. Ann's College.

A girl celebrates her sweetheart's return from the army for a visit at New Year's; their friends gather to make it a festive occasion.

The lad of her heart plays the fiddle, charms all the girls wherever he goes, can match the bravery of any red-coat on the battlefield, is as handsome as any among them; and so on, through successive verses.

Refrain:

's è gillean mo rùin a thòg oirnn sunnd,
's è so a'bhliadhn' ùr thòg sòlas dhuinn;
's è gillean mo rùin a thòg oirnn sunnd.

'Tis the lad of my love who brought us joy,
And 'tis the new year brought rejoicing to us;
'Tis the lad of my love who brought us joy.

The text is said to have been composed about 1815, during the Napoleonic Wars, by a Mrs. MacLeod of Luskentyre, Isle of Harris; because of its continuing popularity it has been much altered and added to. A version has been published in The Macdonald Collection of Gaelic Poetry (Inverness, 1911).

The tune is a lively 6/8 meter, with the 6 measures for the chorus and 4 measures for the solo stanza that characterize most of the milling songs I recorded and that Kennedy-Fraser and Hopekirk found in all the waulking songs in the Hebrides. Some of those recorded by Polly Hitchcock* in the Hebrides have this form, but not all of them; and a few that I was told are used for milling on Cape Breton were different also. As far as I could see the work is continu-

ous, the leader's phrase being required only to keep the group's pace from lagging and let them catch their breath; I did not see anything in the way the work is done to explain why the form should be so nearly consistent as it is.

It was very noticeable that songs sung with the beater at work were mostly in a meter of One, that is, 1/4 or 3/8 for the triplet ones, as nearly as we can notate them. Like the underlying beat for American Indian dances that go on for 3 days and nights, the rhythm was all down beats, with no beat for the rebound. When the group sang without the beater they stood together holding hands or handkerchiefs and the swing developed a longer, more lyrical rhythm.

This melody is cast in the Pentatonic Mode 3 (Gilchrist classification), lacking the 4th degree of the scale and (in most but not all of the voices) the 7th degree. The song is en route to the Ionian mode or the Lydian -- the former I think, in this case. The disagreement among the voices about the inclusion of the major 7th scale degree (at the beginning of the last 2 measures of each chorus) lasts almost throughout the song. It is resolved near the end in favor of the straight pentatonic mode, the 7th degree seemingly voted down under the influence of the strongest voices.

SIDE II, BAND 2: GAOL AN T-SEÒLADAIR (THE SAILOR'S SWEETHEART). Recorded at Briton Cove.

The theme of the faithful sweetheart, who fears her lover may be inconstant yet wishes him well wherever he may be, has given birth to some of their finest lyrical poetry among many peoples of the world.

This Cape Breton version is in the familiar "comallye" form of ballad tunes: four lines, ABBA, the B phrases lying higher than the A's. The tune is just moving out of Pentatonic Mode 2 toward the Aeolian or Dorian modes: it has no 6th degree, and the 2nd degree is rare and unstable, since it is replaced in the last 2 stanzas by the 3rd degree.

The soloist is Dan J. Morrison, who has fine rhythmic variation and melodic decoration at his command. The words are of course transcribed as sung, but the Celticist may want to compare the version printed in Sinclair's *Oranaiche*.

Air feasgar Sàbaid samhnaich dhomh
's mi gabhladh sràid leam féin--
A' smeòr a bha a' ceileirich,
's i ard air bharr nan geug --
's mi cuimhneachadh an (com a nunn)
's an t-àite ta fo'n ghréin;

* See Ethnic Folkways Library Album P. 430, Songs and Pipes of the Hebrides.

Nach truagh nach robh m' comhla riut,
Is còmhradh grinn' linn féin?

Tha m'athair is mo mhàthair
's mo chàirdean rium an gruaim;
Tha gach ann dhiubh ag ràidhtinn:
"Gu bràth a tig ort buaidh?
Nach cuimhnich thu 'do ghòraich'
(do h-óg?) 's a thog thu suas?"
's ann tug mi 'n gaol do'n t-seòladair
Tha seòladair b'air a' chuain.

Ach mise, a! bha gòrach;
Nar ràiteach mi san dân,
Nò bàrd a (dhèanadh?) òran,
's nach chòir dhomh do rann;
Mo h-intinnsan (air dhaingeansan?)
's nach fhaod mi (dhèidh?) a choidhche;
Gun tug mi 'n gaol do'n t-seòladair
Air long a' chrann do bh'àrd.

Ach innsidh mis' an fhirinn duibh:
Mà 'se mo bharail faoin,
Tha 'n gaol atà bho Chaluum dhuits'
A' seòladh mar an (ghaoth?)
Mar dhruidheadh maduinn (gaoram?)
'na seas air gùgan ruaim;
Le teas na grèine 'g eulagheach,
's cha lèir dhuinn è 'sna nèil.

Ma tha nach 'eil id' òrduicheadh
Nach coinnich sinn gu bràth,
Mo dhùrachd thu bh' fallain,
's mo roghainn ort dhe ghradh;
Mà bhristeas tu na cuimhneachd rium,
's nach (fhaigh guidhe?) leat mar bha,
O, cuimhnich (thar sin céile is dhuit,)
As laigh as eirich slàn!

On a Sunday afternoon in winter
I was walking the street by myself --
The bird was melodious
And she high on the treetops --
And I was remembering yonder kinsman (?)
The cheeriest that is under the sun;
Isn't it a shame I'm not together with you,
Talking kindly to each other?

My father and my mother
And my friends are about me in gloom;
Every one of them is saying:
"Can you keep him for always?
Will you not remember your foolishness
Toward (the young man?) you have taken up?"
But I've given my love to the sailor
Who is the sailor that was in the bay.

But I, alas, was foolish;
I was not fluent in poetry,
Nor a bard for making a song,
And not right in verses;
My mind is (in prison?)
And I could never tell
How I gave my love to the sailor

On the ship of the mast that was tall.

But I'll tell you the truth:
If my belief is vain,
Malcolm's love to you
Is sailing like the (wind?)
Like the distillation of morning . . .
Sitting on the bud of a flower,
With the heat of the sun fleeing,
And we can't see it in the clouds.

If it is not in your destiny
That we should be together always,
It is my wish you should be well,
And my best of love to you;
If you break my keepsake,
And (love doesn't move you?) as formerly,
O, remember (hereafter your companion,)
And be happy in all you do ! (lit., lie down
and rise up well).

SIDE II, BAND 3: MOLADH NA LANNDaidh
(IN PRAISE OF ISLAY). Recorded at St. Ann's
College. Celts have been known since the ear-
liest times as world-wanderers, so it is not
surprising that there are many nostalgic Gaelic
songs telling of the beauties of the sea-island
of the singer's birth. This is an especially
famous song, a fine Mixolydian variant of a tune
many times reprinted. Islay (the Gaelic is an
t-Eilean Ileach) is an island of the Inner
Hebrides. Ardmore Point is a headland on Islay.

The singer is Tom Angus MacDonald, who begins
the song with the refrain but since he is singing
alone, he does not repeat it between the verses.
The stanzas, like the refrain, are each 8
measures of rather free 2/4 meter.

Refrain:

's hò ro Eileanaich, hò gù,
I hè rìthill hè rò,
Hò rò Eileanaich, hò gù,
's ann tha mo rùn sa' Lanndaidh.

Verses:

Chì mì thall úd an Aird-mhór,
Aite choilich dhuibh 's a' gheòidh--
Ait' mo chridhe is mo ghaoil --
's an robh mi aotrom, meanmnach.

's tric do leag mi air a bhruaich
A' ghealbhonn a' mhuineil ruaidh,
's bhiodh an liath-chearc leam a nuas,
is choileach ruadh an dranndain.

's tric do leag mi air a thaobh,
Far robh 'm bhealach ann sa chaoil,
Ghealbhonn a' mhuineil chaol
is coileach ruadh nam beanntan.

's ò! mo rùn air Ile 'n fheoir,
Far an d'fhuair mì àrach òg,

Far a' bheil na h-uaislean còir
bu toil leo ceòl as dannsadh.

And hò rò, Islandmen (Hebrideans), hò gù,
I hè rìthill hè rò,
Hò rò Islandmen, hò gù,
And my love it is for Islay.

I saw over yonder Ardmore,
A place of black eddies and coves,
The place of my heart and my love,
And I was relieved and cheerful.

And often I brought down on its edge
The sparrow of the red throat (linnet)
And the heath-hen came down for me,
And the humming moorcock.

And often I brought down on its side
Where there was a path in the osiers
The sparrow of the slender neck
And the moorcock of the mountains.

And O, my love is for grassy Islay,
Where I got my rearing when young,
Where are the honest gentlefolk
Who are fond of music and dancing.

SIDE II, BAND 4: 'S A' RIGHINN THU DHE
SHOGH (THOU ART PRINCESS OF CHEER).
Recorded at Briton Cove.

"Let us be drinking a toast in the water of life!"
says the song. "Whiskey, do not fail me; wine is
the ease of a sad spirit." The popularity of
whiskey among the Highlanders, it is said, dates
only from the 18th century. Before then French
wine was considered the Scotsman's drink, but
when this was cut off by high duties and dwind-
ling prosperity, the Highlander began making
his own liquor. In the ancient lore of the Celts,
wine and beer are mentioned, but not distilled
drinks. Our word whiskey is from the Gaelic
uisge beatha, (heard repeatedly in this song).
This is a translation of the Latin aqua vitae, --
water of life.

The singer identified this song with the phrase:
"I'll take a drink from the hand of my love," and
he quoted other phrases: he will turn water into
wine for his lady, he will sit between her and the
wind to make a shelter from the cold. In the
stanzas actually sung, however, the "princess"
and the "love" seem always to be his drinking
bowl, so far as Dr. Hughes has been able to make
it out.

Refrain:

's a' righinn thu dhe shògh
Tha romham, a chuach;
Thag, a' righinn, thù ge tha uam.

Thou art the princess of cheer
That art before me, my drinking-bowl;
O princess, thou has given (me) all that I need.

This solo is sung by Malcolm Angus MacLeod;
I was told it is sometimes used for milling by
the group.

The song has 11 continuous measures of 2/4
meter that form a single long phrase, for each
stanza. In spite of the emphatic regular accents,
the phrase structure has the freedom of the old
chanting, very close to prose. The tune is based
on Pentatonic Mode 2, but is hexatonic, having
the 2nd degree in but the 6th degree out, en
route to either the Dorian or the Aeolian modes.
The frequency in Gaelic of two-syllable words
whose first syllable is short but accented sug-
gests a possible origin for the "Scotch snap",
which is found in all Gaelic music. Hear the
words fion, leathan, etc. and the metric pattern
determined by them in this song.

SIDE II, BAND 5: MO RUN, MO NIGHEAN
DHONN BHÒIDHEACH (MY LOVE, MY PRETTY
BROWN-HAIRED GIRL). Recorded at Briton
Cove.

A lover sings the praises of his sweetheart. At
the present writing there is considerable dis-
agreement among various consultants about the
contents of the rest of the song, but certainly
someone in the song, either the lover or his lady,
is determined to marry.

Refrain:

Fhìu bha do thuadh,
Mo run, mo nighean dhonn bhòidheach,
Fhìu bha do thuadh.

Well-earned was thy renown,
My love, my pretty brown-haired girl,
Well-earned was thy renown.

The leader is John Alex MacDonald; he emerges
straight out of the chorus like a chanteyman.

This is a definite heptatonic Mode 3 tune, still
without the 4th degree but having a definite major
7th degree, that appears, however, only in the
chorus.

The chorus has 6 measures of 2/4 meter, the
stanza, 4 1/2 measures; they overlap on the
last beat of the chorus.

SIDE II, BAND 6: LAN Ì DE DH'AINNEADH
(SHE IS FULL OF PATIENCE). Recorded at
Briton Cove.

"A sailor's song, used for praising his sweet-
heart." He tells of his pleasure in her company,
and wishes her well wherever she may be. The

first two syllables of the refrain are the last
two of the preceding verse; they therefore vary
from verse to verse. (This same stanzaic form
is found in texts of Icelandic folk songs, and it
is tempting to speculate upon early interchange
between Celts and Norsemen in the Hebrides.)

Refrain:

Làn ì de dh'ainneadh,
(gaoth) i, de ghaois nar,
Ogh ì de dh'ainneadh, (gaoth).

Full is she of patience,
Prudent she is, of wisdom good,
A virgin of patience, and prudent.

Regular milling song structure: 10 measures of
2/4, 6 for the chorus and 4 for the stanza. This
is a circular pentatonic tune with no cadence: it
is tossed off into the air on its major 6th degree
at the end of each chorus and promptly picked
up and thrust onward by the leader, who con-
cludes on the tonic at the same time that the
chorus begins its part on the same note with a
different word.

The 4th and 7th scale degrees are missing; this
is therefore cast in Pentatonic Mode 3. One of
the oldest and best singers, when his turn came
as leader, wavered in with the flatted 4th degree
for a moment, hinting I thought at the rare
Lydian mode; but from the firm way in which
the strongest leader took over for the next
stanza, eliminating this tone, and from the gen-
eral manner of the group, this seemed to be con-
sidered an unwelcome note of the scale.

This is a good illustration of the customary firm
neat ending given the milling songs when the
leader decides it is time to change the song or
end the work. When the group hears the leader
repeat the chorus instead of coming in with
another stanza, they join him on the repetition
after his first few notes have given them the
clue, and they bring the song to an emphatic
end together, without slowing up the pace.

SIDE II, BAND 7: FLOWERS OF THE FOREST.

A piping air played by Captain Fraser Holmes
at St. Ann's College. This tune is described as
"a famous lament that buries every Highlander
on every battlefield, wherever he may be."

SIDE II, BAND 8: I'LL GET A SOLDIER FOR
A SHILLING.

A piping tune heard on the "march back from
the grave" after a soldier's burial. Played
by Captain Fraser Holmes.

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